

Hi, I'm Candice McQueen and I want to share why it is so important that we ensure that all of our students are in class and ready to learn every day.

Our talented educators are leading strong instruction all year long, but if students aren't in class, they can't learn. Attendance is more than a legal or compliance issue – it's a backbone of our education system. Attending class provides a student with an opportunity to learn and develop into their fullest potential. If a student is absent from school for multiple days, that creates a barrier to their opportunity.

We want all of our educators to think comprehensively and creatively about how they try to determine what factors may be contributing to a student's frequent absence and how they can help to address those, whether that is an unstable home environment, bullying in school, or a lack of engagement in their education.

To support this effort, beginning this school year, chronic absenteeism will be a part of our accountability system for districts and schools. Chronic absenteeism means a student misses at least 10 percent of the school year, which is about 18 days. We are calling this new measure our Chronically Out-of-School indicator.

The indicator is intended to capture those students who are missing the opportunity to learn from their teacher, and if a student misses at least 18 days for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspensions, they would be counted in the Chronically Out-of-School indicator.

Our goal is for this metric to drive a conversation about how our schools can foster cultures that are welcoming and engaging for all students and encourage educators to use attendance data to tailor in-school and out-of-school solutions that meet the needs of each child. We also want to encourage community organizations like non-profits and religious institutions to come alongside our families to provide any additional supports they need.

We believe reducing chronic absenteeism will help maximize learning time and improve educational outcomes for students in Tennessee. With more students in class, more students will have the opportunity be successful.